

2/19/19 Oversight

Michigan Corrections Organization  
Oversight Committee  
Written Remarks

Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the Committee.

My name is Jeremy Tripp, I am the Director of Government Affairs for the Michigan Corrections Organization and I am joined today by our statewide President Byron Osborn.

To get things started, I would like to hand the discussion over to Byron and allow him the opportunity to give you a brief background and understanding of why we are here today and I will follow up with a few comments of my own...

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Mr. Chair, Committee Members, thank you for the opportunity to speak.

As Jeremy said, my name is Byron Osborn and I am the current President of the Michigan Corrections Organization (MCO) and have served on the MCO Executive Board for the past 4 years and have been a correctional officer at the Chippewa Correctional Facility for 25 years.

I am here today representing roughly 6,100 unionized correctional officers, and would like to relay the concerns and issues our members have raised regarding the MDOC closure process and its devastating impact on staff and the community.

First, it's worth noting that "MCO" represents state corrections officers at every state run correctional facility in Michigan. As such, closures have a large impact on our membership and often create unique problems that the union has always worked collaboratively to solve.

Over the past several years, we have become experts in this arena as budgets and policies have led to a decrease in the prison population and allowed the state to close multiple facilities, camps and housing units.

While we may not always agree with the need for a closure, we have always worked with the department to lessen the impact on staff, allow officers the ability to transfer or move within the system and make a decision that is right for them and their family.

That being said, our best intentions and efforts cannot make up for a decision that is made without input from the legislature, staff or local communities who often embraced the corrections industry when other communities refused.

Ojibway is a prime example of this. This past August, staff were shocked to learn that their facility was slated for closure and given only four months to make life altering decisions that had, and continue to have, a devastating impact on their personal and professional lives.

It is no secret that the State is currently facing a staffing crisis in corrections with nearly 730+ vacancies statewide. However, the closing of Ojibway has created a situation where these much needed officers are being forced to drive over 100 miles one-way to remain employed, uproot their families and relocate, or leave the MDOC entirely for other work.

In addition, the closing of Ojibway has left the town and community in a state of limbo when it comes to the future. As we speak and over the next year, this decision will have a far reaching effect on local schools, the housing market and the sustainability of businesses that rely on revenue generated and spent by prison employees.

That being said, as a union we understand that times are changing and more metrics and investment are being diverted to programs and

policies aimed at lowering recidivism and shrinking the overall prison population.

But in all of this, we cannot lose track of the real world impact these decisions have on people. We must work harder to provide opportunities for displaced workers and do everything in our power to minimize the impact on communities.

We must also be transparent and up-front about how these decisions are made and give employees, and the community, the ability to prepare for a closure and allow state agencies the time to strategize and assist in these situations.

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Members of the Committee,

As our President has pointed out, and as we heard from community members, the current MDOC closure process is simply inadequate and raises more questions than it answers.

While we understand that any closing will have a lasting impact, we believe certain factors should be considered and required when determining a facility closure.

You should have in front of you a copy of a first of its kind, Corrections-Economic Impact Study that resulted from a partnership with the Center for Labor and Community Studies at The University of Michigan-Dearborn and the Economic Growth Institute at The University of Michigan-Ann Arbor.

This study, which focuses on three main components, is provided as a way of approaching future closures in a more comprehensive and transparent manner. It also examines a path to prepare staff for the future and give them the best tools and skills available to be successful

and fill the needs of the Department of Corrections. We thank you for your time and are happy to answer any questions you may have.